



Some Small Discrepancy: Jean-Christophe-Bailly's Creaturely Ontology

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8 “Some Small Discrepancy”:
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10 Jean-Christophe Bailly’s
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12 Creaturely Ontology
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17 *The Animal Side*. By Jean-Christophe Bailly. Translated by Catherine Porter. (New
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21 *This article situates Jean-Christophe Bailly’s The Animal Side in the continuum of*
22 *Continental philosophy on animality and animal ontology. Exploring Bailly’s linking*
23 *of thought and vision and his insistence on the pivotal role of animals in the emergence*
24 *of European art and image-making, I argue that the political dimension—a central*
25 *implication of Bailly’s text—calls for further attention and development. This points to*
26 *a broader concern within contemporary Continental theory on the subject of animals:*
27 *the need to connect new human and animal ontologies with ethical, political, and*
28 *normative models for the effective articulation of post-anthropocentric collectivities.*

29 KEY WORDS: animality, animals in human thought, Continental philosophy, animal
30 ethics
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32 TENDER IS THE NIGHT
33

34 And yet, because it is night, there is some small discrepancy, the soft but deep growl of
35 something unknown. (Bailly, 2007)

36 *Versant*, in the title of Jean-Christophe Bailly’s *Le versant animal*, first published in French
37 in 2007, means “side,” “slope,” or “hillside.” In *The Animal Side*, tilting geomorphologies
38 serve as metaphors for thinking about the separate yet shared worlds of humans and
39 animals and our sometimes tender, often cruel encounters. Bailly’s slender, 28-section
40 essay, the first of his major texts to be translated into English, is concerned with animals’
41 presence in landscapes, real and imagined, but ultimately with the slips and slides of
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thought, the drifts, grooves, and crevices that mark the mindscape of the nonhuman encounter.¹ Sitting between, or alongside, Derrida's later work and the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, *The Animal Side* joins a growing list of Continental commentaries on animal life, an area only tangentially concerned with questions of ethics and distinct from the explicitly political fields of critical animal studies and animal rights.

Part meditation on animal being, part commentary on the foundational place of animality in image-making and representation, in this work Bailly stalks animals through the *selva oscura* of the Western tradition—primarily Renaissance painting, post-metaphysical German philosophy, and post-Romantic and modern literature. The first two-thirds of the essay explores how art acknowledges the bond between humans and animals. In a series of readings of paintings by Paolo Uccello, Caravaggio, and Piero di Cosimo and the writings of Rilke, Thomas Mann, Karl Philipp Moritz, and Kafka, Bailly shows how, despite their apparent marginality, animals underwrite the works' dimension of meaning. The essay's latter parts work through key philosophical ideas on animality to reclaim animals as the fundamental milieu of significance.

Bailly pursues art and life as twin loci of meaning to which animals are key: First, animals open up possibilities for new meanings by confounding human thought. This argument is by now well rehearsed. If not the subjects of art, animals have at least been the recurring objects of artistic representation. As the repressed "other" of representation, animals' role as vectors of meaning and human identity is confirmed. The second locus of meaning is more complex and has to do with seeing animals as "living beings immersed in significance" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 55). Bailly's objective is to fuse these two significant aspects of animal life.

Animals foster meaning by serving as a creative sidelining of thought, a "thought trace" both in the sense of Derridian conceptual excess and in the cartographic sense of what Bailly (2011a) calls the "pathway of thought" (p. 14). They chart unknown terrains by allowing thought to glimpse worlds beyond its comprehension and so set thought in motion. But animals are also themselves "something like a thought" (p. 13).² The contact with other worlds (which Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, call *devenir-animal*) takes place in life, art, and thought neither as transference nor as transgression or dissolution of human identity, but as what signals the "general exposure of humanity to its original source, a peopling of the mind by that which surrounds it and which it may no longer see, no longer wish to see" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 12). Resuscitating such seeing is, then, at the very same time a defense of a certain conception of thinking as an affective and affecting encounter with an animal's gaze; "an animal," says Bailly (2011a), "is a form that looks at us" (p. 32).

The verb "contemplate" serves as the etymological link between thinking and seeing. Contemplation (from *con* + *templum*, an open area for observation) is the "act of looking at," from the Latin *contemplari*, "to gaze attentively, observe" ("Contemplation," n.d.; see also Onions, 1966), as the Roman augurs did when "observing the flight of birds in a predetermined portion of the sky called *templum*" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 20) for constellations of signs. Even in the superstitious act of bird watching, contemplation retained

its durational character as a “lengthening” (the Latin root *temp* means “to stretch”) that “attends to the time that time takes to pass” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 20). The history of contemplation, from the augurs to Rodin’s *Thinker*, illustrates how thought is brought under control, focused, and internalized, its image in Rodin’s famous sculpture becoming visibly laborious, “an allegory of work” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 21). It is to reset thought on a more pensive trajectory, restore its wandering and “minor” qualities (“this minor thought—the thought that comes when we say we are thinking ‘about nothing’” [Bailly, 2011a, p. 22]), that Bailly invokes the encounter with animals.³

One such encounter opens the book, and it is no accident that the description is familiar, somewhat cliché, or in Bailly’s terms, *cinematic*: A deer jumps out in front of a car at night, and for a moment, driver and animal meet. The scene employs the basic components of cinema: the mechanical and the organic, the thrust of the engine meeting the “quivering grace” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 1) of a warm mammalian body.

In *Electric Animal*, Akira Mizuta Lippit (2000) explored the rearticulation of animal life as media loops at the point of the emergence of cinematic technology. For Bailly, animals are thinkable through the rhetoric of the image, but even as images, we meet them singularly and corporeally. *The Animal Side* is not an essay on film, but its fascination with cinema is everywhere present: “I would like to have a video camera set up,” Bailly (2011a) declares in the opening line, before switching to the third person: “The driver, going slowly now, follows the creature” (p. 1). The mysterious night drive, the unknown man at the wheel, the frightened deer, the camera’s sneaky advance up the road, the noirish cues are all here. If the atmospherics are overdetermined, they also assert the importance of film whose dreaminess lets us “touch with our eyes” what we cannot otherwise see or feel: “It was as if with my eyes, in that instant, for the duration of that instant, I had touched some part of the animal world. Touched, yes, touched with my eyes, despite the impossibility” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 2).

This nocturnal anecdote reminds us that in the human imagination animals figure peripherally but universally and with absolute persistence; it tells us why we look at animals and why we should continue looking. Indeed, *The Animal Side*’s closest precursor in English is John Berger’s 1980 “Why Look at Animals?” and though Berger’s essay is not mentioned, Bailly’s 26th section on the animal painter Gilles Aillaud recalls it by proxy, since it is to Aillaud that Berger dedicated his own piece (Berger, 2009).

CONJUGATIONS OF BEING:

UEXKÜLL, RILKE, HEIDEGGER

Written in the poetic-philosophical voice, *The Animal Side* engages with some of the major theorizations on animals in the Continental tradition, with Jakob von Uexküll’s notion of the *Umwelt* (an organism’s perceptual world) and Rilke’s “the Open” (*das Offene*) serving as the essay’s most cogent tropes.⁴ Other companions include Benjamin (in a fascinating section on objects and plants via a discussion of Benjaminian “aura” [Bailly, 2011a, pp. 16–17]), Bataille (from whom Bailly borrows the phrase “lost intimacy,” which ancient

cave paintings convey and contemporary life all but forfeits), Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida (as well as the philosopher's cat).

Bailly's main argument, however, is with Heidegger (1995), who famously claimed that animals are "poor in world" (p. 185).⁵ Thinking through Rilke's (as I later argue, disputable) conceptualization of animals, Bailly (2011a) points out that the "absence of the categories of time, language, and death . . . is exactly what frees them, what arrays them in the intentionless realm of the open" (p. 19). Looking out into the open, the animal gaze is free from the "constant preoccupation with a past or a future, lured by interpretation" (p. 18). Bailly calls this gaze "pensive," a term designed to bridge conceptual thought and "intelligence" and animals' capacious contemplation, which is neither mindless nor introspective:

This pensivity on the part of animals, in which some have been willing to see only stupor, is in any case made manifest in a thousand different ways, according to species, individuals, and circumstances. It seems to me that certain people have seen this, have approached it, and that others, who may have glimpsed it, have turned away at once. (Bailly, 2011a, p. 15)

Whereas animals gaze pensively into the open, humans think purposively about the world they are building. But the realm of the open "is for Rilke the very space of the infinite wealth of which we ourselves are deprived" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 19). Thus, the open designates the dimension of animal "captivation" that Heidegger (1995) reads as "poor" but that Bailly contrasts to what we could call the "compulsory freedom" of humans, itself a captivation or a limit. And in a lovely contrary (to my mind Christian) turn, Bailly (2011a) suggests that if animals are indeed poor in world, "then at least one can and must plunge down into that poverty and contemplate it—a mystical vantage point here might have me say 'contemplate' it in all its splendor" (p. 25). Calibrating downward, thinking through what is less or weaker than, instead of endowing animals with additional powers to supposedly match our own, is a more interesting and promising project since it suggests that humanity itself is "less than" what our self-aggrandizing would have us believe.

Two internally contradictory orders of freedom emerge in Bailly's ontological account, which alter human self-image. Though human entrepreneurial consciousness is geared toward world-building, and animality is nestled within rather than oriented toward its environment, "*Bildung*, which is the proper domain of human beings and the means by which they constitute themselves as freedom, is at the same time the domain that has always had to bid goodbye to that other radiant freedom, that of the open" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 18). On the one hand, animals' absorption in their world is an impoverishment, whereas on the other, Dasein's *Bildung* is a captive of its own relentless "unveiling" and is unable to access the open. Each modality suggests a different form of non-freedom: Animals are "stuck" in the open, and humans roam the confines of intentional consciousness. Pensivity, then, need not be viewed as a deficiency of (human) thought but can be viewed as the gateway to a different structure or "conjugation of the verb *to be*" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 46), indicating the eccentricity of human thought and the existence of other

1 modes of being and thinking (Bailly, 2011a, p. 49)—the presence alongside us of other
 2 worlds, of multiple nonhuman *Umwelten*.

3 As with Rilke's open, Bailly finds Heidegger's appropriation of Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory
 4 overly negative. Heidegger "turned the meaning of *Umwelt* to his own advantage—that
 5 is, to the benefit of the thesis according to which animals are 'poor in world,'" inhabiting
 6 "captive systems" that doom animals to "stupor and repetition" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 48).
 7 Heidegger's use of Rilke's open and Uexküll's *Umwelt*, Bailly suggests, diminishes these
 8 concepts, leaving Heidegger's own philosophical *Umwelt* substantially poorer.

9 Bailly's reading of Rilke and Uexküll speaks to the broader disputes between mecha-
 10 nistic and nonmechanistic theorizations of life. Uexküll, whose work influenced Rilke
 11 and Heidegger (as well as Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze), positioned himself between the
 12 mechanistic Darwinian view and the teleological view (held by Karl Ernst von Baer and
 13 later revised by Uexküll himself) of nature working according to a plan, imbued with
 14 meaning beyond crude programming. Bailly (2011a) too navigates the tensions between
 15 mechanics and meaning, between life as the accidental unfolding of physical law and an
 16 organism's subjective "improvisation" (p. 54). Whereas in the life sciences, mechanistic
 17 biological reductionism has won the debate, making additional inroads into the fields of
 18 psychology and culture (the rise of evolutionary psychology being one example), critical
 19 theory's recent turn to animality and the concept of "life" provides Uexküll's philosophi-
 20 cal biology with new traction. Uexküll's description of nonhuman worlds whose inner
 21 workings are the result of meaningful (biosemiotic) exchanges between an organism
 22 and its surrounding environment affords even simple animals (e.g., the tick) subjective
 23 experience and depicts nature as a melodious whole made up of a harmonious network
 24 of multiple *Umwelten*.

25 Siding with Uexküll and drawing on Merleau-Ponty's 1950s lectures collected in *Na-*
 26 *ture: Course Notes From the Collège de France*, Bailly wants to bridge the gap between
 27 mechanistic captivation and subjective meaning-making. For Uexküll, animals are not
 28 machines placed in a given environment but authors of their *Umwelt*. An *Umwelt* is
 29 the sum of intelligible exchanges between an organism and its environment. Human
 30 and nonhuman *Umwelten* are open systems, continually reconstituting themselves as
 31 "procedures of intelligibility" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 49): "To be sure, each animal is caught in
 32 the net of its own space-time, but there is always an opening: the systems—as evolution
 33 demonstrates—are not closed" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 49). Not only do animals inhabit their
 34 *Umwelt* meaningfully; in their respective *Umwelten*, animals embody different possibili-
 35 ties of meaning—different forms of thought.

36 If meaning is indeed inherent in the universe, then art and life emerge as forms
 37 of lively expression beyond the strictly mechanical. We could even speak of the art of
 38 other species, such as the flight of bats, which is "pure excitability, pure exploratory
 39 inebriation," "like a dance" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 51). Are the metaphors and simile here
 40 merely rhetorical? Bailly thinks not. Flying is a vital part of the bat's quest for food,
 41 but "whatever role this quest plays in the bat's activity, the predatory function does not
 42 exhaust the meaning of its flight," which Rilke describes as "anguished": tinged with
 43

fear, the result of the “composite character of an animal ‘obliged to fly’ even though it is ‘womb-born’” (quoted in Bailly, 2011a, p. 52). The seamless transition from observing to interpreting the bat’s flight is deliberate, and Bailly rejects the idea that Rilke’s recognition of something like anguish in the bat’s way of being is sheer poetic license or anthropomorphism:

One can no more sum up the meaning of the bat’s flight as fear than one can reduce it to a pure and simple functional sweeping of space. Something else is here—joy, too, no doubt—in this strange and perpetually erased sketch that the bat improvises every evening anew. (Bailly, 2011a, p. 52)

The peculiarities of animal behavior suggest an “exuberant” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 54) dimension of life, beyond mere mechanics. Such moments of passion, waste, or excess are what legitimately link the flight of bats to Rilke’s Eighth Elegy.⁶

Some of the essay’s finest passages are those that comment on artists who have gazed generously into the open and have seen animals as more than just functional. Examples from painting, literature, and film—the cave paintings in Lascaux, Uccello’s *Hunt in the Forest* (ca. 1470), Caravaggio’s *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (ca. 1597), Piero di Cosimo’s *A Satyr Mourning Over a Nymph* (ca. 1495), a 1913 photograph of Kafka and his dog, and Jim Jarmusch’s 1995 film *Dead Man*—articulate the bond, or “pact,” between humans and animals, according to which animals are recognized for all that they are: opaque and embodied, beloved and remote, fearful and vulnerable, acknowledged in their “precedence” and “seniority” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 62) and their singularity and impending extinction. Representations of this kind constitute what I elsewhere have called a “creaturely poetics,” of which Bailly provides his own examples (Pick, 2011). So in Kafka,

animals seem to be resurfacing from some obscure depths . . . and appropriating human language for themselves in order to shed light on those depths. With the small rodents in particular, there is almost something like a transference, involving a whole set of infinitesimal notations of sound and touch, a whole repertory of touch manifesting the sensation involved. (Bailly, 2011a, p. 39)

Aillaud, on the other hand, enters the “sphere in which the silence of painting embraces animal silence, that is, the place where animals, condemned to visibility by the way they are displayed in zoos, expose only their being, their way of passing into being, like dense and compact fragments” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 66). Nicolas Philibert’s documentary *Nenette* (2010), about an aging female orangutan in the Paris Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes, achieves this density. The languorous takes of the 41-year-old great ape in her cage impress on the viewer the heaviness and indolence that captivity and constant display inflict on zoo animals.

In examining the human–animal pact, Bailly (2011a) moves freely between painting and film, viewing cave paintings not so much proto-cinematic as similar to cinema in the work they do—registering the simultaneous separation and contact between human and animal worlds (p. 9).⁷ The Lascaux and Chauvet caves express the primary “cleavage” between humans and animals.

[They] point to an origin or an originary state of designation, and . . . can be understood as a first, stupefying *recording* in which, at the heart of nature as a whole, the animal is recognized as the great other, the first companion. (Bailly, 2011a, p. 9)

Crucially, the human–animal pact displaces violence: “Through their representation of animals something is taken away from violence” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 10). What, then, should we make of the frequent use of animals in contemporary art? Does it suggest an altered “state of designation,” a redrafted pact? Some recent art that portrays (and contains) animals does not commute violence but redoubles and replays it. Work of this kind offers no separate space for art to register a “lost intimacy” with animals. To criticize the work of Damien Hirst, for example, on ethical grounds is not simply to object to the artist’s use and killing of animals, but to critique the work’s artistic provenance: its enacting of a relation to animals that is not a commutation of violence. In Hirst, nothing is “taken away from violence” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 10). To put it another way, Hirst’s art is chemical, not alchemical—though it follows the physiological and biochemical cycles of life, death, and decay, nothing within the work or around it really mutates.

Bailly’s (2011a) readings of specific artworks distinguish between two pivotal orientations of representation, falling on one side or the other “of a fault line running through literature (but through philosophy, anthropology, and the natural sciences as well)”:

On one side there would be the clan of those who dominate, those who will never let animals cross the threshold except in agreed-upon forms that keep them at a distance no matter what; and on the other side, there would be those who are incapable of regulating that distance, those who are troubled by the slightest gap or the slightest glimmer, and for whom the question of the division between humans and animals is not only not settled once and for all but arises at every moment, on every occasion, as soon as an animal comes into view. It would be a little like a mountain with two sides: one without animals, the other where animals are present—the second being the only one, as I see it, that is illuminated by the sun. (Bailly, 2011a, pp. 38–39)

The contention is simple and sweeping: Forms of expression inattentive to animals are deficient (or, as Bailly puts it, in the dark). Animals are the beings without whom our experience, be it artistic, philosophical, ethical, or political, cannot be properly understood and expressed and thus cannot be critiqued and improved. Art and thought that resist the profound exposure to animals are faulty conceptually, in terms of their claims to truth, and affectively, in terms of the experience they try to convey. In other words, human endeavor is indispensably creaturely.

ETHICS AND POLITICS ON THE ANIMAL SIDE

Concrete political and ethical questions pose a particular challenge in *The Animal Side*. Despite the potential radicalism of multiple worlds, the challenging of traditional hierarchies between humans and animals through pensivity, and the subtle portrayal of pathways that crisscross the terrains of human and nonhuman beings, certain tropes in Bailly’s account remain politically problematic.

However malleable Bailly's definition of the gaze as a constellation of affect, vision, and thought is, the politics of the gaze divides the "community of the reservoir of existence" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 26) between those who do and do not look back at us, leaving out creatures and life forms (insects, microbes, plants, and so on) who fall outside the purview of looking. In this, Bailly's ethics reflects a liberal, contractual understanding of sociality. Bailly (2011a) explains that "even if the ability to look is not evenly distributed, it exists in a latent state; it is a characteristic of the animal world as such" (p. 26). He is adamant that community begins with the sense of sight:

It is through sight that we recognize that we are not the only ones who see, that we know that others see us, look at us, contemplate us. The major difference that splits living beings into two categories is found along the line of sight, and sight is inseparable from blood and mobility—this is the world of *heterotrophic* beings. Outside of this world lies the vegetable kingdom, that is, the world of *autotrophic* beings, those beings that do not need to move in order to find food. (Bailly, 2011a, pp. 26–27)

There is much that is intellectually pleasing in the effervescent flow of distinctions (which inevitably give way to additional splits, as in part 12, which includes subdivisions of the vegetal group, among which Bailly counts flowers as a form of the "fractal sublime," but from which he subtracts fruits and grains because of their "volumetric density" [Bailly, 2011a, p. 29]). In his discussion of Benjamin, Bailly (2011a) comes close to admitting that inanimate things can also look back, that objects radiate, their "aura" marking "the entry of things into the regime of significance" (p. 17). But whereas Benjamin speaks of a thing's image, not of its inherent capacity to return a look, animals "have this power on their own" (Bailly, 2011a, p. 17). There is no denying the force of meeting another animal's gaze. Ontologically and ethically, however, the notion that fellow beings must look back at us, or that animals are *essentially* those beings who look back, privileges one type of encounter, whose humanist credentials are all but exhausted and which forecloses other, far-reaching possibilities of zoo- and biocentric relations. With its latent narcissism and frequent oversights, the paradigm of exchanged looks does not offer an exhaustive or even satisfactory model for a posthumanist ethics.

A related problem is Bailly's overemphasis of the human/animal binary. Like Derrida, Bailly's distinctions enumerate rather than reduce the differences between living beings so as to unseat their hierarchical positioning. Nevertheless, the designation of animals as our radical others can at times feel like willful enchantment, at the expense of more worldly relations.⁸ Phrases such as "animal silence" that relegate animals to a realm before language are awkward at best, and they place Bailly at the antihumanist end of the Romantic trajectory. I find him at his most impressive when he is revising Rilke and Heidegger or revisiting works of the European humanist canon. Yet what are the political ramifications of this residual Romanticism?

If *The Animal Side* makes a general case for non-anthropocentric forms of expression, not just art but also political life must open to the pensive dimension. "The pensivity of animals, or at least what I am trying to designate and grasp with the term," Bailly (2011a) writes, "is neither a diversion nor a curiosity."

What is established is that the world in which we live is gazed upon by other beings, that the visible is shared among creatures, and that *a politics could be invented on that basis*, if it is not too late. (Bailly, 2011a, p. 15; emphasis added)

What sort of politics, of community, does Bailly have in mind that begins with the animal gaze? The question of politics becomes more explicit in the essay's closing sections. Politics is perhaps the most difficult domain for working out what opening up to animals and to animality actually means, what it demands of us, and what it might look like. Although Bailly calls for regarding animals' lives as possessing their own meaning and value, his political vision is fairly obscure.

Postbinary, posthuman theories of life—Donna Haraway's most notably—neither yield a particularly radical political program nor provide new normative frameworks in favor of animals. Unlike Haraway's relational model of multi-critter assemblages that traverse all material life, Bailly (2011a) distinguishes individual—or rather finite—forms, such as animals, from “nonfinite forms” (p. 28), such as most plants. The difference in sensibility that informs Bailly and Haraway's respective posthumanisms can perhaps be understood as one of valence. Whereas Haraway's multivalent aggregations of matter describe post-anthropocentric collectives as they already are, what looks like Bailly's lingering liberalism, his attachment to individual persons and forms, feels nostalgic.

Bailly argues,

It is only when animals are taken out, or kept out, of the landscape that the equilibrium is shattered and that we shift to a regime that is no longer even one of brutality, but rather a regime of dark times in which what is taken away from animals corresponds to the very eradication of all relations with them and to the destruction of any possibility of experience. (p. 65)

In writing this, he might be wishing for a return to small family farms and localized, “sustainable” slaughter, to “better” forms of animal husbandry (and killing), as if these do not pose serious ethical problems. What is more, encounters between humans and animals need not be bucolic. They are urban too. Bailly is right that the presence or absence of animals defines a space. Recent decades have shown that it is not only from the “wild” that animals have disappeared. Their presence (not unlike that of the youthful poor) in urban areas has come under new controls. A pensive approach to public space—allowing for whimsicality, encouraging loitering and hanging about, compromising what Derrida called autoimmunity (e.g., Derrida, 2003)—where animals, or at the very least companion animals, are welcome (on streets and in shops, classrooms, and most other human establishments, with or without their human caregivers) may sound scandalously “third world.” But the disciplinary divisions along welfarist and hygienic lines need redrawing if we want to share spaces with other animals as our urban fellows. The result may not be idyllic, but it follows from Bailly's insistence on the significance of seeing (or rather, meeting and touching) living, breathing animals in everyday landscapes.⁹

At the more radical end, the regime of visibility Bailly describes taps into a common sensation:

When we see ewes, cows, or goats wandering in the fields, or even when we go into a barn or a stable, what informs our first impression is not a fantasy of domination or mastery, nor is it an economic phenomenon or a technological stratum: there is always, suspended like a daydream perhaps—but one that would be an integral part of the manna, the sensation of harmony, of a peaceful possibility—a tranquil surge of the world into itself. (Bailly, 2011a, p. 64)

The utopian note of the shift from a purely instrumental relation to commodity animals is unmistakable, but there is here also an appeal to concrete experience that bears the utopian trace. The “sensation of harmony” (what Emily Dickinson more reservedly described as “a transport of cordiality”) is real enough. The “peaceful possibility” awakened by the encounter with animals underpins the public advocacy of many farmed animal sanctuaries. But let us not forget that this is also the experience offered by city and other small farms as well as by petting zoos to which parents take their young children before proceeding to consume animal flesh and secretions.

Although the political dimension of *The Animal Side* remains equivocal, there are germs here of an explicit critique of, for example, environmental political discourse. “It is one thing,” Bailly (2011a) argues, “to invoke ‘biodiveristy’ as an abstract right, using its abstract name; it is something else again to attend very closely to the multiplicity of exposures and states through which the animal world is revealed and concealed” (p. 46). In the penultimate section, having run through the outbreaks of avian flu and mad cow disease, the Chernobyl disaster (to which we now add Fukushima), and the ongoing threat and fait accompli of mass extinction, Bailly posits an apocalyptic scenario: “The sky without birds, the oceans and rivers without fish, the earth without tigers or wolves, ice floes melted with humans below and nothing but humans fighting over water resources. Is it even possible to want that?” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 75). His reply is at once the sharpest and most vague of political statements:

In relation to this tendency, which seems ineluctable, every animal is a beginning, an engagement, a point of animation and intensity, a resistance.

Any politics that takes no account of this (which is to say virtually all politics) is a criminal politics. (Bailly, 2011a, p. 75)

The strengths and weaknesses of the Continental style are evident here in that there is as yet no coherent, elaborate, and sustained alternative to mainstream political discourse governed by such concepts as biodiversity, resource and population “management,” and the economic value of nature. What can theory that draws on contributions from Continental philosophy, poststructuralist critiques of foundationalism, power relations, subjectivity, and liberal-humanist political models have to offer by way of a programmatic commitment to nonhuman animals?

There is currently a small resurgence of works on other, more inclusive, less criminal politics, but it comes principally from the liberal wing of political theory (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2012; Garner, 2012). If there is a need for what I should note is at once lauded and dismissed as a “poetic” engagement with animals (“poetic” is too easily shorthand for

political and ethical respite), articulations have to be found that are practical and normative and that yet retain the slippages, the multiplicities, the “melancholic outpourings” (Bailly, 2011a, p. 32), the pensivity even that the Continental tradition—or better still, that thought on the animal side—can illuminate. This, it seems to me, is where Bailly’s essay beckons and where we must go.

Notes

1. There are particular convergences between *The Animal Side* and Bailly’s subsequent *Le Dépaysement: Voyages en France* (2011b).

2. The notion of animals as thought is reminiscent of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1964) claim in “Le Totémisme Aujourd’hui” that “animals are good to think” (sometimes translated as “good to think with”).

3. Bailly’s idea of minor thinking has some affinity with Leonard Lawlor’s (2007) Derridian notion of “not thinking” (“comment *ne pas penser*”). In response to animals’ supposed thoughtlessness, “we could ask how not to think” (Lawlor, 2007, p. 80). This not-thinking is double-edged: “On the one hand, it means not thinking at all (shall we say, not thinking at all like a beast?), and, on the other, it means an injunction to think well” (Lawlor, 2007, p. 80).

4. See Jakob von Uexküll (2010). For a discussion of Rilke’s “the open” vis-à-vis both Uexküll and Heidegger, see Giorgio Agamben (2004).

5. In part 2 of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1995), Heidegger advances his “three theses” (p. 185) that “the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man is world-forming” (p. 185).

6. In this section, Bailly recasts rather than replies to Thomas Nagel’s famous question: What it is like to be a bat? See Nagel (1979).

7. On cave paintings as proto-cinematic, see Werner Herzog’s 2010 documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. The film was shot in 3D inside the Chauvet caves, and it offers a reflection on the idea of cinema as at once predating and postdating the photographic technology of film.

8. I thank Robert McKay for making me think through this point.

9. These thoughts on shared urban space with animals draw on Krithika Srinivasan’s (2012) work on street dogs in the developed and developing world. See, for example, “The Biopolitics of Animal Being and Welfare.”

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